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ABSTRACT

This study tests basic assumptions of the justice judgment model which assumes there are alternative justice norms whose relative importance depends on the social situation. The subjects (120 men and 120 women) received information about the nutritional neediness and school performance of four children, and then donated money to them. Many subjects paid no attention to the children's school performance, but simply gave more reward to those with greater need. However, when a policy statement emphasized the importance of developing useful citizens who could benefit their country, the subjects changed their pattern of reward distribution and gave higher reward to better performers as well as to children with greater need. The subjects' donation responses were also influenced by whether the funds they dispensed were earmarked for purchase of food or purchase of school supplies. Thus the findings indicate that an allocator's perception of fairness may change in accord with the demands of authority and organizational policy. (Author)

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Justice Judgments: Role Demands and Perception of Fairness

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Equity theory postulates that an individual is motivated to seek a just distribution of rewards and resources (e.g., Adams, 1965; Leventhal, 1976a; Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973). It suggests that an individual who distributes rewards will reward recipients in accordance with their task performance. However, a serious shortcoming of the theory is that it focuses solely on receivers' performance and ignores other factors such as the receivers' needs, or the equality norm. Equity theory does not explain why an allocator often equalizes the distribution of reward or gives more to receivers with greater need (cf. Komorita & Chertkoff, 1973; Lerner, 1974; Leventhal, 1976a; Pruitt, 1972; Sampson, 1969).

The justice judgment model proposed by Leventhal (1976b) integrates diverse views of justice. It assumes that an allocator's perception of fairness can be affected simultaneously by several different standards of justice; namely, an equity norm, a needs norm, and an equality norm. According to the justice judgment model, the allocator's perception of fairness is based on a weighted sum of these justice norms, with the weight of each norm depending greatly on the social situation. The model assumes that the greater the weight an allocator assigns to a justice norm the more he will respond to information that is relevant to that norm. For example, an allocator who has assigned relatively high weight to the needs norm may be unusually responsive to information about recipients' needs for food or shelter and give more to individuals with greater need.

One critical determinant of the relative weight of justice norms is the pattern of role demands placed on the allocator. For example, an allocator who is a decision-maker in an organization that distributes charity dollars

would be likely to give especially high weight to the needs norm in his allocation decisions. He would probably be influenced more by information about receivers' needs than by information about their performance. However, even in a charity organization, there may be other role demands on the allocator. For example, in a charity organization that stressed the goal of aiding individuals who could benefit their country, the allocator might give as much weight to the equity norm as to the needs norm. Such role demands might make him almost as responsive to information about receivers' performance as to information about their needs.

In the present study, subjects were asked to donate money to four needy children. They received information about the children's nutritional neediness (high or low) and performance in school (average or very good). The role demands placed on the subject were manipulated by varying the goal of the charity that would deliver the donations to the children. For some subjects, the goal of the charity was simply to help those who were needy. These subjects were expected to give high weight to the needs norm and be much more responsive to the difference in children's needs than the difference in their performance. For other subjects, the goal of the charity was to help turn children into productive citizens. These subjects were expected to give almost as much weight to the equity norm as to the needs norm and be nearly as responsive to the difference in children's performance as the difference in their needs.

A second purpose of the present study was to examine the effect of varying the resource to be distributed. Some subjects donated money that was earmarked for the purchase of food while others donated money that was earmarked for the purchase of school supplies. It was assumed that an

allocator is more responsive to facts about recipients' needs when such facts clearly reveal the recipients' readiness to utilize the reward than when they are uninformative in this respect. Consequently, subjects who were donating (funds for) food were expected to be highly responsive to information about the children need for food. In contrast, subjects who were donating (funds for) school supplies were expected to be less influenced by information about the children's hunger. Such information would not provide a clear indication of the children's readiness to utilize school supplies.

Method

Subjects and Procedure. The subjects were 120 men and 120 women recruited from introductory psychology classes. They were told they were participating in research sponsored by the (fictitious) National Committee for Human Development that was interested in people's reactions to charity cases. The subjects then received information about four children, cases allegedly drawn from the files of the World Children's Foundation or WCF, a fictitious charity dedicated to saving children throughout the world. The children were

described as 9-year old, third-grade girls living in a South American village. Information about each child's school performance and nutritional neediness was also provided. The subject then divided $3.60 among the four children, the money being provided by the National Committee that was sponsoring the research. The subject's donation, along with other donations, would supposedly be sent to each child by the World Children's Foundation (WCF).

Independent Variables. The descriptions of the four children constituted a 2 X 2 factorial array defined by level of school performance (average or very good) and level of neediness for food (high or low). Thus, two girls were described as slightly needy and two as very needy. And, within these pairs, one girl was described as average and the other as very good.

Subjects were told to divide the money as they wished. However, before making their decision, they read a letter from the WCF that manipulated (1) the relative weights of the needs norm and equity norm, and (2) the type of resource to be distributed. For some subjects, the letter stated the money would be used to purchase food. For others, the letter stated the money would be used to purchase school supplies. Still other subjects received a letter that said nothing about the commodity to be purchased (the unspecified condition). The letter manipulated the weights of the needs norm and equity norm with a statement about the goals of the World Children's Foundation. For half the subjects, the letter increased the relative weight of the needs norm by stating that the goal of the WCF was to save children throughout the world by helping only those who were in great need (needs role demand condition). For other subjects, the letter increased the weight of the equity norm by stating that the goal of the WCF was to save children throughout the world who could benefit society and help only those who could achieve and produce (equity role demand condition).

Results

Each of the 12 cells in Table 1 contains a 2 by 2 matrix that shows the manner in which the subjects in each condition divided $3.60 among the four children as a function of the children's neediness and performance. In every condition, the child with high need and high performance was given a larger share of reward than the child who was low in these respects. To assess responsiveness to information about differences in need and differences in performance, two indices were calculated for each subject, a needs index and a performance index. The mean needs indexes (high need minus low) are shown in columns 3, 6, and 9 of Table 1. They indicate the extent to which the subjects in each condition gave more money to the children with higher need. The performance indexes (very good minus av.) are shown in rows 3, 6, 9, and 12 of Table 1. They indicate the extent to which the subjects in each condition gave more money to the children with better performance. Separate 2 X 3 X 2 ANOVAs were applied to the needs indices and the performance indices. To supplement these analyses, the difference between the needs index and performance index was calculated for each subject as follows:

(high need minus low) — (very good minus av.).

A 2 X 3 X 2 ANOVA was applied to these difference scores to ascertain the effect of the independent variables on the extent to which subjects' donations were affected more by information about the children's neediness than by information about performance. Summaries of the results of these analyses of variance are shown in Table 2.

When role demands favored the needs norm, there was a significant rise in the subjects' tendency to give more money to the children with greater need. The mean score on the needs index rose from .43 in the equity role demand condition to .62 in the needs role demand condition ($F = 7.64$, $p < .01$).

Simultaneously, there was a significant drop in the subjects' tendency to give more money to children with better performance. The mean score on the performance index fell from .32 in the equity role demand condition to .02 in the needs role demand condition ($F = 28.29$, $p < .01$). In fact, the subjects in the needs role demand condition were totally unaffected by information about the children's performance. As shown in rows 9 and 12 of Table 1, the subjects in this condition showed no tendency to give more to better performers. The performance indices in these rows were not greater than zero ($F < 1$ in all cases). In contrast, the corresponding values in the equity role demand condition were all significantly greater than zero (see rows 3 and 6 of Table 1). On the other hand, in every experimental condition, the needs index was significantly greater than zero. Furthermore, the significant main effect of role demand shown in the last column of Table 2 indicates that, overall, the impact of needs information on subjects' donations was substantially greater than the impact of performance information.

Table 3 shows the influence of type of resource on the needs and performance indices. The means were derived from Table 1. As shown by the ANOVAs summarized in Table 2, the type of resource that subjects dispensed affected their responsiveness to needs information but not performance information. Planned comparisons revealed that the subjects' tendency to give more reward to children with greater nutritional need declined significantly in the school supplies condition. Thus, the mean need index of .36 in the school supplies condition is significantly lower than the corresponding index in the food condition ($F = 7.74$, $df = 1/228$, $p < .01$) and unspecified condition ($F = 12.01$, $df = 1/228$, $p < .01$). This result indicates that information about receivers' needs has greater impact on an allocator's distribution of a resource when the information clearly reveals the receivers' readiness to utilize the resource.

The results support basic assumptions of the justice judgment model. The subjects' allocation decisions were influenced by two different justice norms, the needs norm and the equity norm. The relative weight of the two norms was strongly affected by the social situation. The needs norm received especially high weight because the experimental situation was one in which helping other human beings was of central importance. However, when role demands emphasized the importance of fostering productive and useful behavior, the weight of the equity norm increased and subjects gave higher reward to better performers as well as to children with greater need. In contrast, when role demands made the needs norm extremely prominent, the weight assigned to the equity norm dropped to zero. The children's performance had no effect on the subjects' judgments and the subjects gave as much reward to average performers as to very good performers. The findings indicate that an allocator's perception of fairness may change in accord with the demands of authority and organizational policy (cf. Kelman & Lawrence, 1972; Milgram, 1974). The results also indicate the necessity of using a multidimensional concept of justice, one that explicity recognizes there are alternative norms of justice whose relative importance depends on the social situation. The equity norm is only one of a family of justice norms that influence an individual's perception of fairness.

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Table 1

Mean Donations as a Function of Role Demand, Type of Resource, and Children's Neediness and Performance

Role demand	Sex of subject	Child's performance	Type of resource and nutritional neediness: Unspecified — Child's need for food: Low	Unspecified — Child's need for food: High	Unspecified — High need minus low	Food — Child's need for food: Low	Food — Child's need for food: High	Food — High need minus low	School supplies — Child's need for food: Low	School supplies — Child's need for food: High	School supplies — High need minus low
Equity norm	Male	Average	.45	.88		.53	.91		.66	.83	
		Very good	.78	1.49	.57**	.77	1.38	.49**	.89	1.22	.25*
		Very good minus Av.		.47**			.35**			.31**	
	Female	Average	.61	.89		.54	.98		.62	.98	
		Very good	.87	1.22	.32**	.59	1.48	.66**	.83	1.16	.34**
		Very good minus Av.		.29**			.27**			.20*	
Needs norm	Male	Average	.42	1.34		.63	1.15		.71	1.18	
		Very good	.45	1.40	.94**	.67	1.15	.50**	.58	1.12	.50**
		Very good minus Av.		.05			.02			-.10	
	Female	Average	.53	1.28		.60	1.14		.70	1.03	
		Very good	.55	1.25	.73**	.51	1.35	.69**	.74	1.13	.36**
		Very good minus Av.		.00			.06			.07	

Note.-- For each entry, n = 20. Indices denoted by stars are significantly greater than zero at the .05 level (*) or .01 level (**).

Table 2

Summaries of Analyses of Variance for the Needs Index, Performance Index, and Difference Between Them

Source	df	Needs index		Performance index		Needs index minus performance index	
		MS	F	MS	F	MS	F
Role demand (A)	1	7.87	7.64**	21.78	28.29**	55.83	37.66**
Resource (B)	2	6.87	6.67**	.58	<1	3.48	2.35
Subject's sex (C)	1	.13	<1	.32	<1	.04	<1
A X B	2	2.85	2.77	.21	<1	4.55	3.07*
A X C	1	.19	<1	1.90	2.46	3.28	2.21
B X C	2	3.39	3.30*	.40	<1	2.28	1.54
A X B X C	2	.47	<1	.17	<1	1.21	<1
Error	228	1.03		.77		1.48	

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Table 3

Mean Effect of Type of Resource on Subjects' Responsiveness to Information about Recipients' Neediness and Performance

Index	Type of resource			F
	Unspecified	Food	School supplies	
Needs index (responsiveness to needs information)	.64	.58	.36	6.67**
Performance index (responsiveness to performance information)	.20	.18	.12	<1

Note.-- For each entry, $n = 80$. The starred F value is significant at the .01 level